



MEETING THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

2004

Abstract

“A Common Sense Approach to Project Management”

Bill Gibson

The NASA Space and Earth Science Enterprises conduct space-based research in astronomy, high-energy astrophysics, space physics, earth sciences and a number of other meritorious science disciplines. Many of these important science missions are cost capped and must be implemented within a fixed budget or face the very real threat of cancellation. While dealing with a spectrum of technical, schedule and cost control problems, project managers are now asked to accept, and deal with, an increasingly invasive review and oversight process by the Agency. To help cope with the reality of managing cost-capped space science missions, project managers must employ a set of trustworthy, timely and accurate tools for quantifying key performance metrics. Using the information provided by these tools as inputs to a set of “command sense” management practices, the project manager has his best chance of controlling risk and meeting science goals and objectives.

This paper presents a common sense approach to project management that can help to implement a science mission with a modest-sized management team by avoiding “form over substance” management activities and processes. Included in this paper are discussions of requirements, schedule, cost and risk management practices that can be implemented without consuming the project team in endless meetings, reviews, and telecons. The critical importance of reacting to early warning signs of trouble is discussed along with the need to motivate, and even inspire the project team to hold schedule.

Cost capped space science missions can be successfully implemented but only if mission requirements are stable, resources are available, schedules are realistic and achievable, supporting technologies are in place, and problems are reacted to quickly and effectively. The management tools and the common sense management practices discussed in the paper can help considerably in delivering an on-time, and scientifically successful, mission.



NASA Project Management Conference